

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. FRIST. If there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in adjournment under the previous order, following the remarks of Senator LANDRIEU.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise to say a few words about the issue that the Senator from Louisiana is going to talk about, but I do not want to take any of her time away from her. I know it is late in the evening but if I could, I will say a few words before leaving the floor. I hope that my Senate colleagues who are following this debate and conversation, as well as those who are viewing these proceedings, understand what my colleague from Louisiana, Senator MARY LANDRIEU, and her colleague, Senator VITTER have been through.

They have faced a disaster virtually unprecedented in modern American history. Having been through a few minor disasters and floods in my area, I cannot imagine the stress that they have been under to serve the public, which is their responsibility in the Senate. Though I do not know Senator VITTER as well, nor have I known him as long, I can certainly attest to his concern for the people of Louisiana. I can speak personally about the concern of Senator LANDRIEU.

From the moment I got her on the telephone—and it was not an easy task—while she was still fighting flood waters in her hometown of New Orleans, until this moment today, she has been consumed with one focused objective, what she can do to spare the suffering of the people she represents and to rebuild and recover from this terrible disaster.

I visited New Orleans a few weeks ago with a bipartisan delegation, met with her as well as Commander Allen, who is heading up the FEMA effort now, as well as Governor Blanco and Mayor Nagin, many of them local officials. It is clear now that they have faced challenges that most public servants do not dream of. The reason we are here tonight is because she is reaching the end of her patience. I have talked to her during the course of this day, and I know what is boiling up inside of her.

The thought that we would leave Washington, the capital of our Nation, for a week or 10 days and be back in our home States is a real concern to her because she knows while we are gone, people in Louisiana will continue to suffer because of our inaction and our unwillingness to respond to the basics. Look at what has happened so far. The administration announces initially no-bid contracts to some of the most recognizable big hitters in Washington, corporations that always seem to win when others are facing misfortune.

The administration says it is going to cut the wages for construction workers who are going back to work to rebuild in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, exactly the opposite of what these families need to get back on their feet.

The administration has refused to come forward with the emergency housing that is needed for so many of these people who are literally at their wits' end, trying to keep their families together, living in the most extreme circumstances.

This Senator from Louisiana has been on the floor repeatedly, appealing to both sides of the aisle, but particularly to the majority, for help with health care for the people who have been displaced. Someone lucky enough to have health insurance when Hurricane Katrina hit may have lost not only their home but also their job and their health insurance, and now they are adrift. Senator LANDRIEU has been working with Senator GRASSLEY, a Republican, and Senator BAUCUS, a Democrat, to make certain they have health care coverage. It is not enough to say if they show up in an emergency room, somebody will probably take care of them. Is that what you would like your medical future to be for you and your family? That is not what Senator LANDRIEU wants and that is what she is fighting to change.

We have also seen the suggestion we cut back on cash payments to people who have no job, may not even have access to the unemployment checks or whatever they are entitled to at this moment.

I think one of the worst and crowning blows is this notion that somehow every penny we put into rebuilding America, rebuilding the Gulf Coast States—New Orleans, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama—has to be paid for by cutting other programs that may help poor people. Today the Agriculture Committee is considering cuts in food stamps, \$500 million or \$600 million in cuts in food stamps so we can provide help to Hurricane Katrina victims. So we will literally take food from the mouths of babies and mothers and families across America to give them to the babies and mothers and families of Hurricane Katrina? Is that what it has come to in America?

The suggestion we would cut Medicaid, the health insurance for the poor and elderly and disabled in America, so we can provide that same Medicaid, that same health insurance for the poor and elderly and disabled and displaced in Hurricane Katrina, is that what it has come to in America?

I think what troubles me the most is the situation here where there is an insistence by some of my colleagues that every penny we spend investing in rebuilding the Gulf Coast States has to be met by a cut in spending for the most vulnerable people in America. None of these people who are insisting on this match of cut for spending said that when we were talking about re-

building Iraq—\$18 billion, without a single dollar of it set off against any cut in spending. Not one of them brought up this idea of cutting spending to give tax breaks to the wealthiest people in America. But when it comes to the most vulnerable, those helpless victims of this hurricane in those States, they are demanding this setoff that, frankly, will make life more painful and difficult for vulnerable people all across America.

This is a real test of who we are and what we stand for. If we are truly in this together, if we are going to be unified as a nation and react as a community and as a family, we can do better. America can do better. I salute the Senator from Louisiana. I will turn the floor over to her, thank her for her leadership, and say this Senator and many others will fight with you to the bitter end to make sure the people you represent understand that they do not stand alone.

I yield the floor.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Illinois, who has been such a champion for people in need, for people who need their Government to step up and to be with them in times of difficulty. That is what governments are all about.

We appreciate the self-sufficiency of people. We appreciate the value of upward mobility. We appreciate the values of family that Illinois and Louisiana treasure, about moving forward. But we also understand when life throws you a curve ball, when you are hit by a monster storm, when the home you have worked for all your life and might in fact have been paid for is literally washed away before your eyes; when the business that your father or your mother handed down to you and you built up to be something to be proud of, to turn over to your children, is gone in the flickering of an eye; when your child is in an accident and it was unexpected and the health insurance doesn't pay for it and you have a child now who is in great need—you would think we would have a government that would not question whether we should be there to help.

We would say: Of course. This is America. This is what we do. We help each other through difficult times. That is the way the country used to be. That is the country I grew up in. But I am standing here now on the floor at a quarter to 11 on Wednesday night. We are getting ready to pass a very important bill. We, the other Senator from Louisiana, Senator VITTER, and I, have been patient—persistent but patient over the 31 days since this first hurricane hit Louisiana and devastated our largest city and rocked the whole southern part of our State back on its heels. We have been to countless meetings, countless conferences, countless telephone conversations, countless visits back to our State and region, visiting from shelters to briefing rooms. We have outlined what we need. I have to stand here now at a quarter to 11 on